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Review of *Nikkei Farmer on the Nebraska Plains: A Memoir* by Hisanori Kano

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Nikkei Farmer on the Nebraska Plains: A Memoir. By Hisanori Kano. Edited and introduced by Tai Kreidler, from a translation by Rose Yamamoto. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2010. xxv + 203 pp. Photographs, notes, reference list, bibliography. \$34.95.

In 1916, with William Jennings Bryan as sponsor, Hisanori Kano left a life of nobility in Japan to study at Nebraska's Ag College and live as a common farmer. *Nikkei Farmer on the Nebraska Plains* is his memoir, spanning from his birth in 1889 until 1976.

Actually, this memoir provides very little information about farming. (Reverend Kano's chosen title was *Sixty Years of Life in America*.) Kano did farm for several years in Litchfield, Nebraska. In 1925, however, he became a lay missionary for the Episcopal Church to serve the approximately seven hundred Japanese immigrants living across Nebraska. In this capacity he moved regularly to new areas, including Mitchell, Hebron, and North

Platte. Kano's story focuses on his efforts to give social and spiritual guidance to these Japanese communities, not on farming.

Kano's devotion to his Christian beliefs is, in fact, the main subject of the entire memoir. From the time he first felt "the unseen hand of God" (in primary school), during his internment years (1941–1943), and through his retirement, Kano shows us examples of how he found solace and strength, and helped others do the same, in Christianity. Considering that Kano wrote his memoir at the urging of a Japanese chaplain, this is perhaps not a surprise. To appreciate this memoir fully, though, it is essential to read it through the lens of cultural relativity. Reverend Kano wrote in Japanese, for a Japanese audience. The qualities that make this memoir compelling to that Japanese audience are the very ones that might prevent another audience from being immediately engaged.

For example, an American reader might protest that the narrative lacks emotion. The death of Kano's father, Kano's internment, his return to Japan after a forty-five-year absence—none of these is told evocatively. Furthermore, Kano could be perceived as overly righteous. His sense of honor, gratitude, and piousness are ever present—whether he is learning to milk cows or advising his fellow internees to "look beyond . . . individual inconvenience and violation of personal rights."

But to a Japanese audience of Kano's contemporaries, this memoir would surely stir feelings of pride and admiration. Those readers would discern that not only Christianity, but also *bushidō* (*Way of the Warrior*), shaped Kano's life. They would understand that Kano earnestly strove to live according to the widely revered qualities of *bushidō*: loyalty, stoicism, and self-sacrifice. They would also infer and appreciate, through what Kano does *not* say about his emotions, that he and his family had many struggles and triumphs. How Reverend Kano's memoir is received may rest upon how much the reader can access the nuances of the Japanese mind.

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